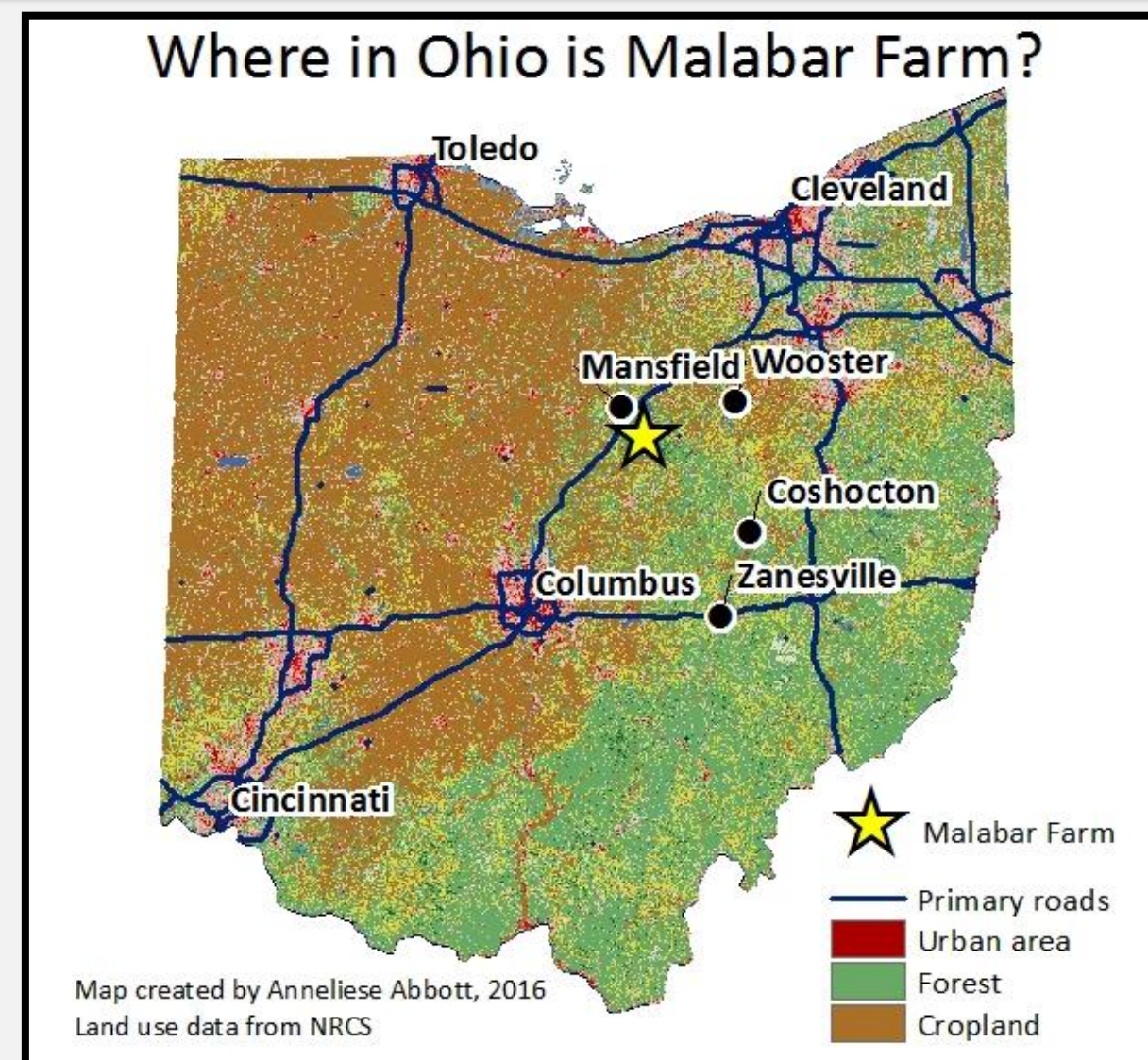


Historic Soil Conservation at Malabar Farm, 1939-1972

Anneliese Abbott; Dr. James Metzger, advisor
Department of Horticulture and Crop Science

Introduction

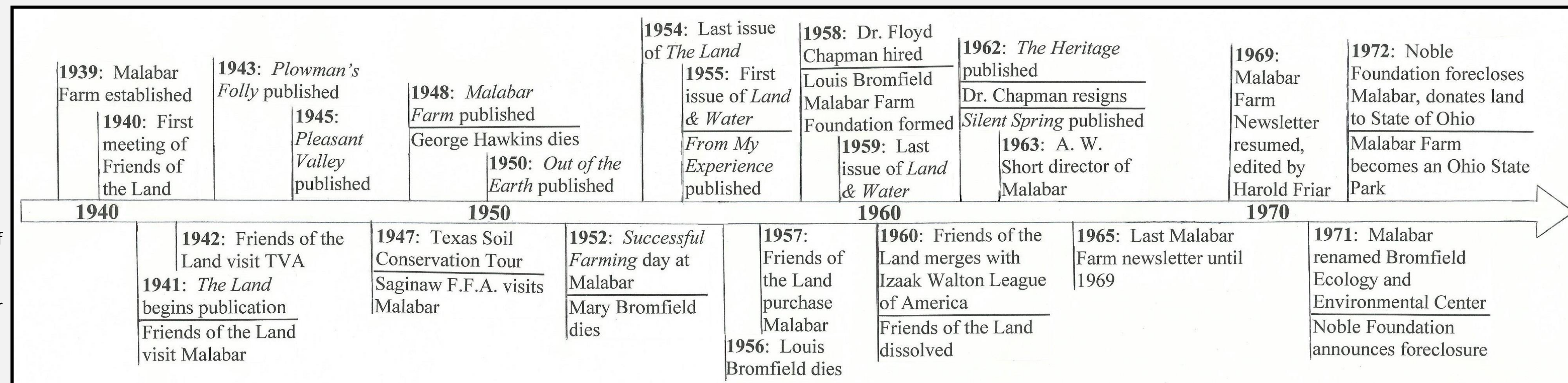
- Soil conservation in the US began in earnest in the 1940s and '50s
- Louis Bromfield's Malabar Farm showcased good soil conservation practices
- A wealth of information about historic soil conservation exists, but is not easily accessible
- This purpose of this project was to compile some of this information and summarize the history of Malabar Farm
- This historical background is an invaluable reference for discussions about sustainability



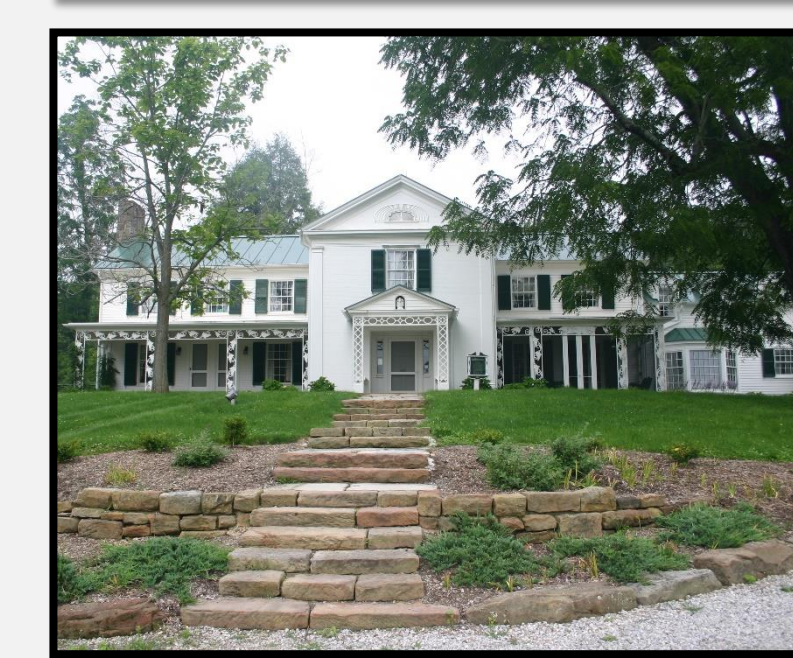
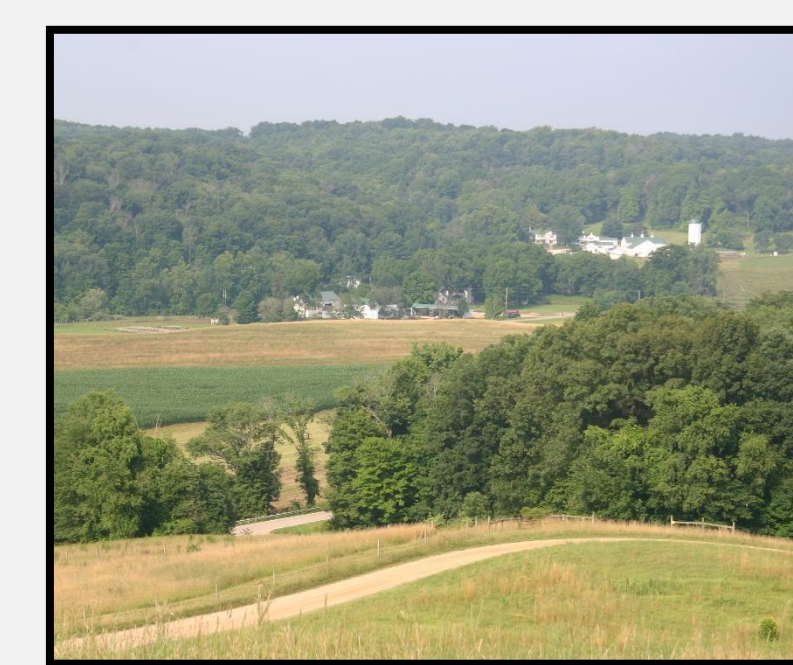
Right: Malabar Farm timeline, 1939-1972, listing major events in the history of Malabar Farm and Friends of the Land, including the publication of major books.

Left: Map of Ohio showing the location of Malabar Farm with background of current land use data. Malabar Farm is on the border of the glaciated and unglaciated regions of Ohio.

The Impact of Malabar Farm on Soil Conservation



- In 1939, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louis Bromfield (1896-1956) established Malabar Farm in Richland County, Ohio
- Using newly developed scientific soil conservation practices, Bromfield restored this worn-out farmland to productivity
- Bromfield's literary fame allowed him to inform the general public about agriculture through books and farm tours
- He had more freedom to experiment with conservation practices on a large scale than many experiment stations
- Bromfield's work at Malabar Farm helped raise public awareness about the need for soil conservation
- After Louis Bromfield died, Friends of the Land purchased Malabar Farm in 1957 with a loan from the Noble Foundation
- Friends of the Land, a soil conservation organization, wanted to turn Malabar into an ecological center (The Louis Bromfield Institute) but lacked the necessary funds
- The Louis Bromfield Malabar Farm Foundation managed Malabar from 1958-1972 and was foreclosed by the Noble Foundation
- The Noble Foundation donated Malabar Farm to the State of Ohio in 1972, and Malabar Farm became an Ohio State Park
- Today, Malabar Farm State Park is open to the public, and plans for the future include once again using the farm to educate people about good agriculture
- Malabar Farm played an important role in the soil conservation movement of the 1940s and '50s and is one of the best surviving examples of successful agriculture in that period
- Malabar demonstrates how soil conservation and restoration can increase both productivity and sustainability of farmland



Modern-day photos by Anneliese Abbott. From top to bottom: View of Malabar Farm from Mt. Jeez. Photo taken July 6, 2015. Barn mural re-painted by Tom Bachelder. Photo taken July 7, 2015. Windrows of hay in Malabar field. Photo taken July 6, 2015. Crowds still visit the Big House at Malabar. Photo taken July 7, 2015.

Why is the history of Malabar Farm relevant today?

- In the 20th century, soil erosion in the United States occurred at catastrophic rates before soil conservation practices were utilized
- The benefits of soil conservation are often taken for granted today, and some farmers are reverting to unsustainable management practices
- Agricultural methods may have changed since Bromfield's day, but the basic principle of maintaining soil health is still critically important for a sustainable agricultural system



Soil erosion in Wayne County, Ohio, 1953. OARDC Photo Archives, Dept. of Horticulture and Crop Science, Ohio State University.

Implications

- Malabar Farm is an example of how education about soil conservation can help reform agricultural practices
- Soil conservation is just as important today as it was seventy years ago
- The modern soil conservation movement was one of the most crucial events of the 20th century and should be emphasized in history programs
- Malabar Farm and its history could be a great tool to teach children and adults about sustainability
- It is imperative that the history of soil conservation in the US be considered in future discussions about sustainable agriculture



Hands-on education is just as important now as when Bromfield (third from left) took visitors for walks in his fields. Ferguson Negative. Box 70, Folder 1500, Louis Bromfield Collection.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following individuals who helped make this research a reality:

- Rebecca Jewett, Geoffrey Smith, and the very helpful students who work in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room
- Korre Boyer and Tom Bachelder at Malabar Farm
- The staff at the Ohio History Center
- The numerous donors whose scholarships have enabled me to attend OSU and conduct research, including the Roy M. Kottman Scholars Program, the Wilhelm and Eleanor Beckert Scholarship Fund, the Thomas B. Kyle Scholarship Fund, and the Roy O. Becker Crop Science Scholarship Fund

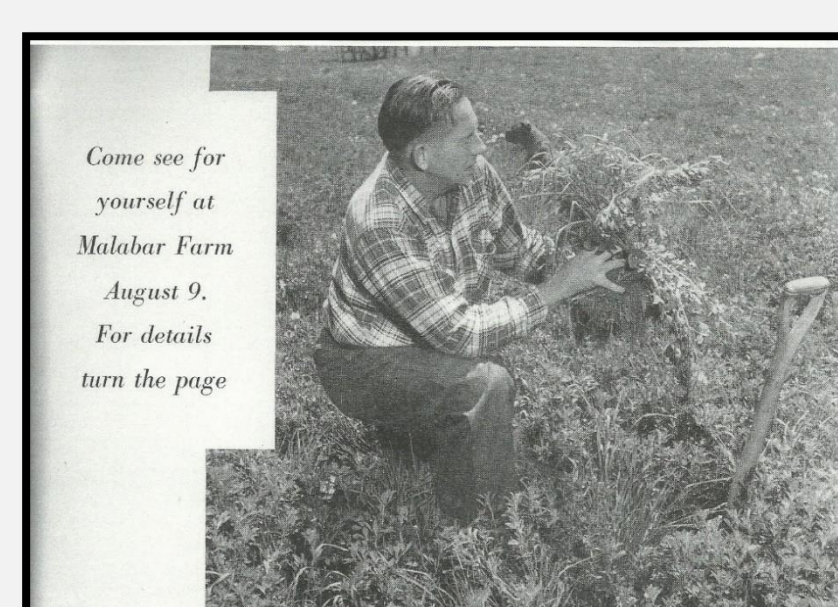
Selected References

- Bromfield, Louis. (1945). *Pleasant Valley*. New York, NY: Harper Brothers. Reprinted 1997 by The Wooster Book Company, Wooster, OH.
- Bromfield, Louis. (1948). *Malabar Farm*. Reprinted 1999 by The Wooster Book Company, Wooster, OH.
- Bromfield, Louis. (1955). *From My Experience*. Wooster, OH: The Wooster Book Company. Originally published by HarperCollins.
- Friends of the Land Records Papers, MSS 364, Ohio Historical Society.
- *Malabar Farm Newsletter*. (1959-1970). Lucas, OH: The Louis Bromfield Malabar Farm Foundation.
- *Land and Water*. (1955-1959). Zanesville, OH: Friends of the Land.
- Louis Bromfield Collection, SPEC.RARE.CMS.95, The Ohio State University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.
- *The Land*. (1941-1954). Columbus, OH: Friends of the Land.

Methods

- Archival research was conducted in Spring 2015 in the Louis Bromfield Collection at The Ohio State University's Rare Books and Manuscripts library
- A site visit to Malabar was made July 6-7, 2015, with a private tour by Korre Boyer, manager of Malabar Farm State Park, and Thomas Bachelder, Malabar historian
- Friends of the Land publications *The Land* and *Land & Water* were also used as references
- Archival research in the Friends of the Land Records, housed at the Ohio History Center, was conducted in Autumn 2015

Some materials examined for research:
Top: Page from *Successful Farming* Magazine, Box 131, Folder 2127, Louis Bromfield Collection.
Center: Louis Bromfield (left) kneels to touch soil. Box 70, Folder 1498, Louis Bromfield Collection.
Bottom: Page from *The Land*, Volume III, No. 3 (Spring 1944).



How I get organic matter—quick! By Louis Bromfield

